

dissertations on the topic. He is the leading American expert on the eschatology of Karl Rahner, and has published extensively on the Rahnerian theology of the “last things.” This most recent text is the fruit of a twelve-lecture audio course taught by Phan for Now You Know Media. Expanding somewhat from the twenty-minute audio segments, Phan offers a solid introduction to the major themes of contemporary eschatology, directed to a popular audience. This pared-down approach to the essentials is presented without extensive bibliographical references or scholarly apparatuses, making it an ideal resource for an undergraduate or adult religious education course.

Phan’s working definition of eschatology is “an extrapolation of Jesus’ death and afterlife to the death and afterlife of all human beings.” He calls this the “Christologization of anthropology”—that is, the use of the life, death, resurrection, and afterlife of Christ as a theological resource for understanding the fate of all human beings.

A major strength of Phan’s book is his application of eschatological truths to daily life. Eschatology deals with the “present things, matters that are of utmost importance for us here and now, and of course, also there and then” (116). Phan urges believers to tap into the spiritual power of the future eschatological realities of resurrection, judgment, universal reconciliation, and heaven, and not simply consider them as occurring after death or at the end of time.

Another strong point of Phan’s approach is how he uses Scripture. Fundamentalistic readings of Scripture—both Protestant and Catholic—can cause confusion, misunderstanding, and sometimes erroneous doctrine. In the opening chapters he clearly demonstrates the futility of fundamentalist interpretations of apocalyptic biblical narrative, which lead to literalistic and misguided eschatologies that frighten rather than encourage believers. These apocalyptic texts, according to Phan, are “not description, prediction, or report” (147).

The biblical methodology that Phan sketches out, by contrast, is a way of reading apocalyptic texts that is historical-critical as well as pastoral. His device is a three-step process. First, he engages exegesis, in order to understand the “world behind the text.” Second, he uses criticism to understand the “world in the text.” And, third, he uses hermeneutics to understand the “world in front of the text” (13). This hermeneutical process unlocks the meaning of the “Word that God delivered to the saints in times past and still speaks to us today” (14).

A third strength of Phan’s eschatology primer is his incorporation of the liturgical and sacramental life of the church, which has the “last things” woven into its very fabric. This is best seen in his chapter on the Eucharist

and eschatology, which unpacks the “real presence” but also the “real absence” of Jesus in the already/not-yet dynamic of salvation and eschatology. Interestingly, this sacramental approach to eschatology also spills over into the final chapter on “a new heaven and a new earth.” The transformation of the cosmos at the end of time is likened to the glorified transformation of the body of Jesus in the Resurrection and the transubstantiation of the bread and wine in the Eucharist. Indeed, the “new creation” is already at work in the Easter mysteries and the mystery of the altar.

Still, a few shortcomings of Phan’s primer bear mentioning. One is the paucity of Marian theology, considering that the dogma of the Assumption contains a constellation of eschatological doctrines. Of course, in a short book, many things will be left out. But perhaps the treatment of other religious traditions (which, to an untrained theological reader, might inadvertently appear to be religious relativism) could have been abbreviated to make room for Mary’s mysterious connection to believers “now and at the hour of our death.” Lastly, the theology of purgatory needs a balancing between the purgation experienced in this life by the cost of discipleship and the healing and transformation of believers after death and before complete glorification.

In the end, though, a positive evaluation of Phan’s book overall is certainly in order. Phan’s eschatology instills Christian hope that is based “on what God has done for Jesus of Nazareth ... and on what ... we hope ... God will do for all human beings” (167).

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At Play in Creation: Merton’s Awakening to the Feminine Divine. By Christopher Pramuk. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015. xii + 138 pages. \$17.95 (paper).
doi: 10.1017/hor.2016.39

In this little book, Pramuk provides nine “retreat conferences” that invite the reader to taste and experience the presence of the Wisdom of God, whom he describes as Sophia, the Feminine Divine. I say “taste and experience” because unlike Pramuk’s earlier work, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton*, this book seeks to present the main ideas of his earlier analysis on the “sophianic” wisdom found in Merton’s writings in a more “narrative, poetic, and personal key” (x), so as to awaken a similar experience within the reader. The result is evocative spiritual writing on Sophia—the Wisdom of God—and particularly how that wisdom is both hidden and revealed within the context

of the present world's joys and sufferings. Thus, the reader is invited to join with the author in realizing "a renewed sense of God's nearness and friendship, and above all a fierce hope, rising not from any formal 'theology' as such but derived from the hidden matrices of life itself, Life made from Love" (xi).

Pramuk's style in this work is very much like Merton's own; the writing is intuitive, spontaneous, and personal rather than formal and analytical. Rather than developing a critical analysis of Merton's context, thought, and writings regarding Sophia and feminine characteristics of the divine, this text develops a creative spiritual reflection on Sophia as "the presence and mercy of God 'pervading all things' to which Merton's witness points" (x). This is not to say that the work lacks critical theological reflection, but that, by the author's own admission, "formal theology" is neither the focus nor tone of the work. Following this aim, Pramuk brings the reader through beautifully written and often personal reflections on Sophia first, briefly, through Merton's own life context, then through his writings (particularly his prose poem *Hagia Sophia*) with reference to the wisdom tradition found among Russian Orthodox theologians, and finally through the journals of Ely Hillelsum, which describe her life as a Jew living in Amsterdam during the Nazi occupation. Like one of Merton's journals, *At Play in Creation* often pulls together multiple images and literary and theological sources within the same paragraph. Sophia is variously identified as "the eros of God," "the co-creativity of God," "the feminine Wisdom Child," "the female face of God," "God's nurturing, indwelling presence," "the divine Child in us," "the power of God's mercy," "God's freedom for love," and "God herself." Also, Pramuk assembles a vast cloud of witnesses to Sophia's presence, including, among many others, Boris Pasternak, Lao Tzu, Martin Buber, Henry David Thoreau, Sergius Bulgakov, Abraham Heschel, Malala Yousefzai, Rowan Williams, Leonard Cohen, Bill Withers, Joni Mitchell, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Pramuk's own son, Henry.

Of particular interest is the author's inclusion of a chapter on Hillelsum. Through Hillelsum's journals, Pramuk provides at once a connection with Jewish traditions of wisdom and an account of Sophia as hope amid darkness and of God's power present in "the vulnerability and weakness of incarnate love" (79). Displaying very fine spiritual writing reminiscent of Merton's own prose, Pramuk writes that to live with wisdom is to "live fully awake in the center of these contradictions of our times while refusing to be defined by them, to accommodate ourselves to them, like an essence fed into a computer" (85).

After finishing the book, the reader may still be left wondering what, exactly, makes Sophia the embodiment of "the Feminine Divine." Pramuk remarks that Merton hears Sophia as the voice of God "in an unmistakably feminine key" (32), but there is little sustained exploration of feminist theory in fleshing out what specifically makes Sophia a feminine reality.

The title of the book might lead a reader to desire more in this respect. Nevertheless, those interested in a more critical analysis of Sophia in Merton's writing will no doubt find such in Pramuk's earlier work. The present work offers readers familiar with Merton and biblical and theological wisdom traditions a personally enriching and intellectually creative exploration of Sophia, the Wisdom of God.

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A Hindu Theology of Liberation: Not-Two Is Not One. By Anantanand Rambachan. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015. xi + 230 pages. \$29.95 (paper).
doi: 10.1017/hor.2016.40

Hindus have written theologies of liberation (*moksas*) for millennia, but Anantanand Rambachan is the first to work out an Advaita Vedanta liberation theology in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century style. *A Hindu Theology of Liberation* does many things that will feel familiar to readers of Latin American, African American, or Dalit Christian theology. It relates theology to social systems. It attends to power dynamics and listens to marginalized perspectives. It retrieves liberating resources from scripture and the tradition. It articulates an Advaita theology for the contemporary context.

Rambachan's work differs from these liberation theology movements, however, in the subject position he brings to the task. Rather than a voice from the margins of the tradition, he embodies many of the markers of an authoritative teacher of Advaita Vedanta.

Far from invalidating Rambachan's contribution, this situation reflects the impact of liberation theology on the mainstream theological conversation: its methods have become the go-to resource for addressing social issues theologically. Rambachan draws on this corpus to address patriarchy (chapter 5), homophobia (chapter 6), anthropocentrism (chapter 7), childism (chapter 8), and caste (chapter 9) in his tradition. Rambachan also advances the field, especially in his chapter on childism, which draws creatively from the four ends of life in the Hindu tradition to argue that nonviolence (*ahimsa*) toward children is a "basic obligation and duty" (*vaṁśa*) (159).

In his prolegomenon, Rambachan must swim against a strong tide of thought that Advaitins should not respond to the world, which is not ultimate reality but the province of *maya*. His justification builds on the foundations of his earlier book, *The Advaita Worldview* (2006), in which he argues for creation as the celebrative and intentional self-expression of *brahman*. The